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ABSTRACT

Data from 149 female members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) were used to construct a composite of the reading habits and their relation to other characterisitics of this group. The typical respondent was a married woman between 26 and 40 years old who had attended college but remained at home to care for children under the age of 18, who had been a church member for more than 20 years and was active in church affairs, who read the scriptures about 20 minutes daily, and who read other materials (newspapers, magazines, and books) about 30 minutes daily. Four generalizations emerged from the study. (1) Active LDS women, at least in this sample, do follow the encouragement of church leaders to read the scriptures and other church periodicals. (2) The reading habits and tastes of this group were not unlike those found in other adult reading surveys. (3) Aside from church-related materials, Mormon women had similar reading habits regardless of geographic location or size of community. (4) Although more education was related to more reading, those women in the survey with less education were reading more than would be predicted from studies of other adults of similar educational backgrounds. (RL)

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The Reading Habits of Church Active Mormon Women

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The Reading Habits of Church Active Mormon Women

Reading research about members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is scarce. While scattered and fragmentary data exist from unpublished studies, most of it has not been available to public view. These studies cover diverse subjects such as reading skills of missionaries, readability levels of Church materials and scripture, description-evaluations of church literacy projects, family scripture reading practices, comprehension of church materials in different languages, reading problems in seminary populations, and the reading habits of Brigham Young University students. Other adult reading literature related to this study but not specific to church affiliation includes several cross sectional surveys of North American adults of varied socioeconomic and educational backgrounds. These studies tend to produce uniform results: women who are housewives between ages 21-40 and who are in the highest income brackets make up the largest group of readers. Investigations of this type and extensive reviews of the adult reading habit literature are found in Cole and Gold (1979), Mikulecky, Shanklin and Caverly (1979), and in the original study by the first author (Appleton, 1981). No research however, published or unpublished, could be located on the specific focus of this survey: the reading habits of selected North American women who are active members of the LDS* Church.

The purpose of the study was to provide data about what is read and how much time is spent reading. This was related to characteristics of the group including age, education, employment, income, marital status, length of church membership, children in the home, and where reading material was obtained.

*LDS is an abbreviation for Latter-day Saint

Research design and sample

A 21 item forced choice questionnaire was constructed. Item content asked for information about reading during the previous 12 months (1980-1981) and considered reading information on scriptures, church magazines and books, other magazines and books, newspapers, and where the reading material was obtained. The questionnaire was pre-tested on three occasions before the final form was distributed. Questionnaires were anonymous and were sent to acquaintances of one of the authors who had expressed an interest in the study. Questionnaires were then distributed to women in each geographical area known to be active members of the LDS church. From the 233 questionnaires distributed, 149 or 64% were returned.

The questionnaires were marked as to geographical area and were numerically coded. The information was transferred to punch cards and the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data collected. The Frequencies subprogram was used to determine numbers and percentages. The Crosstabs subprogram was used to measure the association of one variable to another. The data from each geographical area were also examined and compared.

Ten North American geographical areas representing Canada and the U.S. were chosen for the sample. They included the North, South, East, and West; and large, medium, and small size cities, as well as the small town. No rural areas were studied. The specific geographical areas represented and the percent of the total returns received from each were Calgary, 13%; Houston, 4%; Idaho Falls, 15%; Kamloops, 12%; Kenora, 3%; Salt Lake City, 8%; Santa Rosa, 10%; Scarsdale, 15%; Provo, 14%; and Yakima, 8%.

Characteristics of the sample are summarized and are rounded off to the nearest percentage point. Tables in the original study include more

detailed data. The age distribution of the group included 38% in the 26-40 year range, 31% in the 41-60 year group, 21% in the 18-25 group and 11% were over 61 years of age. Education included 31% with a 4 year college degree or more, 34% with some higher education, and 21% who had completed high school. For those with post secondary education 43% indicated education as a major field of study; 14%, science; 19%, business; and 32%, other fields. Married were 72% and single, widowed, and divorced were 28% of the total group. Total annual gross income in the homes which included spouse income was in these ranges: under $10,000, 23%; $10,000-$20,000, 26%; $21,000-$40,000, 36%; $41,000-$80,000, 13%; and over $80,000, 3%. Years of church membership included the following: under 10 years, 12%; 11-20 years, 19%; over 20 years, 70%. Employed for pay out of the home were 35% of the sample and not employed were 57%. Working for pay less than 30 hours per week were 35% of the sample, 39% worked 31-40 hours per week and 16% worked more than 40 hours per week. Respondents indicating children in the home under 18 years of age comprised 66% of the sample.

Findings and discussion

The Crosstabs analysis generated a large amount of data and 31 tables. Interested readers are referred to the original 70 page study for details of the analysis and findings.

Tables 1, 2, and 3

about here

How much time was spent reading? Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the data. Most of the women read both generally and in the scriptures. On a monthly basis excluding scripture reading, respondents indicated the following in rounded off percentages: 60% of the sample read over 20 hours per month and 36% spent 1-10 hours reading. Scripture reading per month from Table 2 indicated 65% of the group read from 1-10 hours or about 20 minutes a day at most. Table 3 relates general and scripture reading time per month. It indicates that 23% of the sample who read generally 1-10 hours each month also read scriptures 1-10 hours in the same period. Similarly, 21% of the group who read 1-10 hours generally also read 11-20 hours of scripture per week.

What did the group read? Church periodicals were read. Respondents read the Ensign (97%), the New Era (45%), and the Church News (69%). Data for the Friend was not available.

The most commonly read non-church magazine was Reader's Digest. Sixty-seven women (45%) listed it. Other titles were Family Circle and Good Housekeeping, each listed 36 (24%) times, and Better Homes and Gardens and Woman's Day, each listed 35 (24%) times. Time was listed 30 (20%) times, National Geographic was listed 28 (19%) times, and Newsweek was listed 24 (16%) times. There were 125 titles mentioned. They reflected a wide variety of topics from professional journals to recreation.

The single most frequently read church book was Spencer W. Kimball, which was mentioned 43 (29%) times. Camilla was listed 29 (20%) times, and Miracle of Forgiveness was listed 23 (15%) times. A wide assortment of recent publications, mostly fiction, such as Sam, Charley, and The Bishop's Horserace were mentioned. Some Mormon classics, such as Jesus the Christ and Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith were also mentioned several times.

Table 1

General Reading Per Month Exluding Scripture

Amount of Time	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Under 1 hour	6	4.1
1 to 10 hours	53	35.8
11 to 20 hours	45	30.4
Over 20 hours	44	29.7
Total	148	100.0

Table 2

Scripture Reading Per Month

Amount of Time	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Sample
Under 1 hour	21	14.4
1 to 10 hours	95	65.1
11 to 20 hours	20	13.7
Over 20 hours	10	6.8
Total	146	100.0

Table 3

A Comparison of the Number of Hours of General Reading Per Month (V1) with the Number of Hours of Scripture Reading Per Month (V2)

Count Row Pct Col Pct Tot Pct	V1 Under 1 hour	1 to 10 hours	11 to 20 hours	Over 20 hours	Row Total
V2					
Under 1 hour	2 33.3 9.5 1.4	4 66.7 4.3 2.8	0 0.0 0.0 0.0	0 0.0 0.0 0.0	6 4.1
1 to 10 hours	13 25.0 61.9 9.0	34 65.0 36.2 23.4	4 7.7 20.0 2.8	1 1.9 10.0 0.7	52 35.9
11 to 20 hours	3 6.7 14.3 2.1	31 68.9 33.0 21.4	7 15.6 35.0 4.8	4 8.9 40.0 2.8	45 31.0
Over 20 hours	3 7.1 14.3 2.1	25 59.5 26.6 17.2	9 21.4 45.0 6.2	5 11.9 50.0 3.4	42 29.0
Column Total	21 14.5	94 64.8	20 13.8	10 6.9	145 100.0

The fiction books most often listed were Shogun, My Antonia, Kane and Abel and Masada. Many other best sellers for the period were mentioned. as well as older titles, such as Gone With the Wind and Pride and Prejudice. There was a great diversity of types of fiction, literature, mystery, historical romance, humor, fiction, and juvenile. There were only two titles which would be considered Gothic romances.

The nonfiction results indicated a diverse interest in subjects such as finance, history, science, politics, poetry, and genealogy. One topic more common than others was family, which covered areas such as birth, death, raising children, gardening, cooking, marriage, divorce, and house management. The only title repeated more than twice was Orphan Train.

Forty three (29%) women indicated they read only one newspaper. Forty seven (32%) women indicated two newspapers read, 25 (17%) women said three newspapers, 18 (12%) women said four newspapers, and 10 (7%) said five newspapers. The most common one read was their local newspaper.

The women were asked where they obtained their reading materials. Twenty-five (17%) said the church library, 68 (47%) said the public library, 29 (20%) said a university or college library, 142 (99%) said their own collection, and 75 (52%) said they borrowed from someone. Two indicated they read while in waiting rooms. These figures total more than 100 percent but some women obtained materials from more than one source.

Employment and reading findings are of interest. They indicate that many employed women in the sample found time to read. Fifty seven percent of those who work did so for 31 or more hours per week and were also 35% of those working women who read over 21 hours per month. Thirty one percent of the group who worked 31 hours per week or more read scriptures up to 10 hours per month.

The traditional relationship between reading and education was supported

by the findings. The more education the woman had, the more they read. Fifty percent of those with a masters degree or more read over 20 hours a month. By contrast, half that amount or 25% of those with a high school education or less read 20 hours or more per month. Of interest, however, was that 64% of women with only a high school education or less read over 10 hours per month. In other words, while higher education related to more time reading, those without it still did some reading.

Findings concerning marital status did not descriminate or show much relationship to either general or scripture reading. The same was true for the presence of children under 18 in the home. For example, the married women in this group read as much as single women. Single women however spent slightly more time reading scripture. The homemaking role apparently did not seem to interfere with time for reading scripture or general materials. Length of church membership indicated members of over 20 years duration tended to read more scripture than newer members. Sixty seven percent of the group with longer membership status read more than 11 hours of scripture per month. There were no analysis made however with age, years of membership, and amount of scripture reading.

There was a relationship between age and amount of general reading. Of those who read over 20 hours per month, 79% were in the 26-60 age group, 44% in the 26-40 group, and 45% were in the 41-60 group. The age of women in this study seemed to have little relationship to the number of hours of scripture reading per month. The largest group of women reading up to 10 hours of scripture per month was in the age group of 26 to 40 and comprised 25% of the total group.

In general there seemed to be little relationship between income and amount of scripture reading. Thirty-five percent of women were in the gross household income range of $21,000 to $40,000 and 54% of that group read over

20 hours per month of general materials. Twenty eight percent of women in that group read up to 10 hours per month of scripture. Those women who had total household income of $41,000 to $80,000 per year and who read over 20 hours per month of scripture were 36% of the group in that income range.

Methodologically the study is not without fault. Since a replication using a male sample is anticipated, possible improvements and weaknesses of the study were noted. The percentage of returns, 64%, was lower than desirable and rural data was not included. In such survey research, one always wonders how data from the non-respondents and reports from other kinds of communities or respondents would have affected the findings. Indeed in this study there was some indication that many women who thought they did not read very much may not have returned their questionnaires. If this is so, the data may be biased in favor of the readers rather than those who read less. The anonymity of the questionnaires might also have been improved. Questionnaires, though unsigned, were not returned in sealed envelopes. This might have intimidated some subjects, each of whom were asked to return their questionnaire to someone they knew personally. Consequently some subjects might not have returned questionnaires or might have written socially desirable but inaccurate responses. In addition, the survey relied on the memory of subjects to indicate what they had read in the previous 12 months or past week. As every researcher knows, memory based data are often imperfect measures. A further weakness of the study was the ranges of the scripture reading catagories. More restricted ranges would have provided more useful data. Finally, though piloted three times, a few items were obviously misunderstood by some respondents and could have been improved.

Conclusion and implications

Due to the amount of data, a composite woman was defined. In this survey she

was between 26 and 40 years of age with an annual gross income in her home between $21,000 and $40,000. She had attended college, majoring in education but was not employed for pay out of her home. She was married and had children at home under the age of 18. She had been a member of the LDS Church for more than 20 years, was currently active, and read the scriptures for about twenty minutes every day. For about thirty minutes every day she also read a newspaper and/or magazine and/or book which she had purchased or received as a gift.

Of what significance is the study to LDS reading educators? Given the limitations of the study, four generalizations emerge considered important by the researchers. First, active LDS women, at least in this sample, do follow the encouragement of Church leaders to read the scriptures and other church periodicals. Second, the reading habits and tastes of this group are not unlike those found in other adult reading surveys. Excepting church related materials, they read best sellers, classics, fiction and nonfiction and the newspapers. They read the same magazines with about the same frequency for the U.S. as a whole (Wadley, 1981). Like most adults, they prefer to read books they own rather than obtain them at the library. Third, Mormon women had similar reading habits regardless of where they lived in North America. Their reading materials were alike as well as the amount of time spent reading. Geographical location and size of community did not seem to have a bearing on reading habits. Fourth, LDS women with less than a higher education were readers. While more education was related to more reading, those with lesser education were reading more than would be predicted from studies of other adults of similar educational backgrounds.

Most of the group were readers. Judged by society's usual standards, they are conservative in their choices and comprised of women who find time

for reading, even when employed. They tend not to read low level novels or other escape literature considered undesirable by most literary standards. In terms of LDS theology which encourages the study of scriptures, "all good books," and the acquisition of learning generally, the study within its limitations is supportive and encouraging. According to this study, active LDS adult women wherever they live and whatever their circumstances read the scriptures, other religious periodicals, current events, fiction and non-fiction, and a variety of other popular and traditional literature.

It is to be hoped however, that other research will periodically tap the reading practices of LDS readers. The influence of reading on thinking, or on the conduct and values of life, child rearing, or spirituality among many significant topics is generally considered important. How reading is influenced by Church membership is much less understood.

What a person chooses to read and for what reasons as related to church activity and belief is an unexplored field in reading. If, as commonly assumed, moral and religious values are central to LDS life, relationships should exist with reading choices, habits, and practices. Investigating the nature of those relationships offers good potential for research. For example, what do various groups within the LDS Church with differing degrees of activity and belief read? How are they the same? How are they different? Does what they read predict in any way the strength of their membership? Or perhaps more plausibly, does strength of religious commitment determine what is and what is not read? Or less directly, how might LDS members compare with Protestant or Catholic groups on these same dimensions? The questions are intriguing in their interest and generate others that can produce research hypotheses. It is to be hoped that LDS reading educators and others will give more attention to this religious variable, a neglected area in adult reading research.

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